No 96. SATURDAY, *December* 2, 1786.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

Aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.
VIRG.

SIR,

AS in reading, either for inſtruction or entertainment, one is always moſt ſtruck with what comes neareſt to one's ſelf, we who are in the country have been particularly attentive to your rural papers. The family of which I am a member at preſent, have been very much entertained with them. We have found out ſeveral of our acquaintance in the letter of *Urbanus*; and even the picture of your godmother, though a little antiquated, was too ſtrongly marked for ſome of our party not to diſcover a reſemblance to it. *Adraſtus*'s portrait of himſelf was too ſerious for our meddling with. We never allow our imaginations to ſport with the ſacredneſs of ſorrow.

Since the receipt of thoſe papers, it has become an amuſement here to draw ſketches for the

the Lounger; and some of us last night after supper proposed, that every one should paint his neighbour. To this fancy and a rainy morning you owe this letter. I will try to give you the whole groupe; I am sure, if I could do it justice, it should please your benevolent readers better than the picture of Urbanus, though I give that gentleman perfect credit for the fidelity as well as the power of his pencil. But a family-piece of *Greuze* is more pleasing, though perhaps less valued, than one of *Hemskirk* or *Teniers*.

That I may, however, take no advantage, I will begin with myself. I am not of so serious a disposition as Adrastus, yet am I not altogether without some of that rural sentiment which he indulges, and which you describe. I own I had acuter feelings some five and twenty years ago; but having now lived half a century, I am become a good deal less heroic, less visionary, and less tender than I was; yet I have not forgotten what my own feelings were, and I can perfectly understand what those of younger men are; I confess I like to see them as warm as I myself was at their age, and enjoy a sort of self-flattery in thinking that I have learned to be wiser, by being a little older than they. Something of the same reflection I venture now and then to indulge, from the circumstance of being a ba-

a bachelor; I think myſelf as well as I am, and yet I am pleaſed to ſee a huſband and a father happy. And as I am neither from age nor ſituation quite condemned to celibacy, I have that ſort of intereſt in an amiable woman, or a promiſing child, that makes their company very agreeable to me, and I believe mine not unpleaſant to them. I have, thank God, good health and good ſpirits; was bred ſomewhat of a ſcholar by my father, who lived in town, and a pretty complete ſportſman by my grandfather, who reſided in the country. When at ſchool, I ſtole an hour or two in the evening to learn muſic, and had a tolerable knack at making bad verſes when at college. In ſhort, there are few things come acroſs me in which I am quite left out, and I have not the vanity of excellence to ſupport in any of them.

I generally ſpend ſome months of Autumn in the country, and this ſeaſon have paſſed them very agreeably at the houſe of a gentleman, who, from particular circumſtances, I am pretty confident is the perſon you once mentioned under the appellation of *Benevolus*. A general idea of his character you have given in the paper I allude to: of his family, and their country life, will you allow me to try a little ſketch now?

You

You have hinted at the uſe Benevolus makes of his wealth. In the country, as far as we can gather from thoſe around him, he gives largely; but as it is neither from the impulſe of ſickly ſentiment or ſhallow vanity, his largeſſes tend oftener to incite induſtry than to ſupply indigence. Indeed, I have been forced to obſerve, that to nurſe poverty is, politically ſpeaking, to harbour idleneſs and vice; to prevent it is much the better way; for a man ſeldom thrives that does not deſerve to thrive; and, except from ſome unfortunate accidents, which Benevolus is ever ready to pity and to redreſs, a man is ſeldom poor without deſerving to be ſo. The occupiers of Benevolus's eſtate are generally thriving: he ſays, that to promote this is not an expenſive indulgence; but, on the contrary, that he gains by it. 'Tis ſome money advanced at firſt, ſays he; but no capital is more productive than that which is laid out on the happineſs of one's people. Some plans indeed have been ſuggeſted to him for doubling the revenue of his eſtate, by diſpeopling it of three fourths of its inhabitants; but he would never conſent to them. If I wiſhed for money, he replied to an adviſer of theſe ſchemes, there are many trades you ſhould rather recommend to me; but the proudeſt property of a country gentleman is that of men. He has not, however, that inordinate

ordinate desire for extending the bounds of his estate, that some great proprietors have. A gentleman, whose family had been reduced in its circumstances, offered his land to him for sale. Benevolus expressed his sorrow for the necessity that forced the neighbour to this measure, and, after examining into his affairs, gave him credit to the extent of his debts. The young man went abroad, and from the recommendation of his honesty and worth, and great assiduity in business, acquired a fortune sufficient to redeem his affairs. Somebody observed what an enviable purchase that gentleman's land would have been to Benevolus. "But those "acres would not have dined with me with such "a face of happiness and gratitude as Mr. —— "did to-day."

Such faces, indeed, are a favourite part of the entertainment at Benevolus's table. One day of the week, which he jokingly calls his wife's rout day, there is an additional leaf put to the table, for the reception of some of the principal farmers on his estate, from whose conversation, he says, he derives much useful knowledge in country-business, and in the management of his affairs. He behaves to them in such a way as to remove all restraint from the inequality of rank; and talking to every man on the subject he knows best, makes every man

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more pleaſed with himſelf, and more uſeful to thoſe who hear him. The reception indeed of thoſe gueſts ſtrongly marks the propriety of feeling and of behaviour of the family. There is none of that ſneer and tittering which one ſees among the young gentlemen and ladies of other tables; the children ſtrive who ſhall help the ſenior farmer of the ſet; they aſk queſtions about the different members of his houſehold, and ſometimes ſend little preſents to his children. I have had the charge of ſome parties of the young people, who dined with the farmers in return; and then we have ſo many long ſtories when we come back in the evening. There are no ſuch eggs, nor fowls, nor cream, as we meet with in thoſe excurſions. I am always appealed to as a voucher; and I can ſafely ſay, that we thought ſo, eſpecially when we took a long walk, or fiſhed, or ſhot by the way.

Benevolus has four ſons and three daughters. Their education has been ſcrupulouſly attended to; and there are perhaps no young people of their age more accompliſhed. When I ſpeak of their accompliſhments, I do not mean only their ſkill in the ordinary branches of education, muſic, dancing, drawing, and ſo forth. I have ſeen ſuch acquirements paſs through the memory and the fingers of young people, yet leave little fruit behind them. It is not ſo with my young

young friends here; not only are the faculties employed, but the mind is enriched by all their ſtudies. I have learned a great deal of true philoſophy, during the rainy days of this ſeaſon, from the little philoſophers in Benevolus's library; and when I indulge myſelf in a morning's lounge beſide the young ladies and their mother, I always riſe with ſentiments better regulated, with feelings more attuned, than when I ſat down. The young people's accompliſhments are ſometimes ſhewn, but never exhibited; brought forth, unaſſumingly, to beſtow pleaſure on others, not to miniſter to their own vanity, or that of their parents. In muſic their talents are ſuch as might attract the applauſe of the moſt ſkilful; yet they never refuſe to exert them in the ſtyle that may pleaſe the moſt ignorant. Muſic their father confeſſes he is fond of, beyond the moderation of a philoſopher. 'Tis a relaxation, he ſays, which indulges without debaſing the feelings, which employs without waſting the mind. The firſt time I was here I had rode in a very bad day through a very dreary road; it was dark before I reached the houſe. The tranſition from the battering rain, the howling wind, and a flooded road, to a ſaloon lighted cheerily up, and filled with the mingled ſounds of their family-concert, was ſo delightful, that I ſhall never forget it.

There

There is, however, a living harmony in the appearance of the family, that adds confiderably to the pleafure of this and every other entertainment. To fee how the boys hang upon their father, and with what looks of tendernefs the girls gather round their mother! "To be "happy at home," faid Benevolus one day to me, when we were talking of the fex, "is one "of the beft dowries we can give a daughter "with a good hufband, and the beft preventive againft her chufing a bad one. How "many miferable matches have I known fome "of my neighbours girls make, merely to efcape "from the prifon of their father's houfe; and "having married for freedom, they refolved "to be as little as they could in their huf-"band's."

Benevolus's Lady, though the mother of fo many children, is ftill a very fine woman. That lofty elegance, however, which, in her younger days, I remember awing fo many lovers into adoration, fhe has now foftened into a matron gentlenefs, which is infinitely engaging. There is a modeft neatnefs in her drefs, a chaftened grace in her figure, a fort of timid livelinefs in her converfation, which we cannot but love ourfelves, and are not furprifed to fee her hufband look on with delight. In the management of her houfehold-concerns, fhe exerts a quiet and

and unperceived attention to her family and her guests, to their convenience, their sports, their amusements, which accommodates every one without the tax of seeing it bustled for. In the little circles at breakfast, where the plans of the day are laid, one never finds those faces of embarrassment, those whispers of concealment, which may be observed in some houses. Mamma is applied to in all arrangements, consulted in schemes for excursions, in the difficulty of interfering engagements, and is often pressed to be of parties, which she sometimes enlivens with her presence.

Benevolus, in the same manner, is frequently the companion of his son's sports, and rides very keenly after an excellent pack of harriers, though they say he has gone rather seldomer out this season than he used to do, having got so good a deputy in me. He was disputing t'other day with the clergyman of the parish, a very learned and a very worthy man, on the love of sport. "I allow, my good Sir (said "Benevolus), that there are better uses for "time; but, exclusive of exercise to the body, "there are so many dissipations more hurtful "to the mind (dissipations even of reading, "of thinking, and of feeling, which are never "reckoned on as such), that if sport be harm-"less, it is useful. I have another reason for "encouraging it in my son. It will give him

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"an additional tie to the country, which is to "be the chief ſcene of his future life, as a man "likes his wife the better that, beſides more "important accompliſhments, ſhe can ſing and "dance; and in both caſes, a man of a feeling "mind will connect with the mere amuſement, "ideas of affection, and remembrances of ten-"derneſs. Methinks I perceive an error in the "ſyſtem of education which ſome country-"gentlemen follow with their ſons. They ſend "them, when lads, to ſtudy at foreign univer-"ſities, and to travel into foreign countries, "and then expect them, rather unreaſonably, "to become country-gentlemen at their return. "My ſon ſhall travel to ſee other countries, "but he ſhall firſt learn to love his own. "There is a poliſh, there are ornaments, I "know, which travel gives; but the baſis muſt "be an attachment to home. My ſon's ruffles "may be of lace, but his ſhirt muſt be of more "durable ſtuff."

In this purpoſe Benevolus has perfectly ſucceeded with his ſon, who is now eighteen, with much of the information of a man, but with all the unaſſuming modeſty of a boy. 'Tis his pleaſure and his pride to acknowledge the claims which his native ſcenes have upon him. He knows the name of every hamlet, and of its inhabitants; he viſits them when he can be of uſe, gives encouragement to their improvements, and diſtri-

diſtributes rewards to the induſtrious. In return, they feel the moſt perfect fealty and regard to him. The old men obſerve how like he is to his father; and their wives trace the eyes and the lips of his mother.

The ſame good ſenſe in their management, and a ſimilar attention to their happineſs, is ſhewn to every inferior member of Benevolus's houſehold. His domeſtics revere and love him; yet regularity and attention are no where ſo habitual. Attention to every gueſt is one of the firſt leſſons a ſervant learns at this houſe, and an attention of that uſeful and benevolent ſort which is exactly the reverſe of what is practiſed at ſome great houſes in the country, where a man is vaſtly well attended, provided he has attendants of his own that make it needleſs; but a perſon of inferior rank may wait ſome time before he can find a ſervant whoſe province it is to take any care of him. At Benevolus's, it is every man's province to ſhew a ſtranger kindneſs; and there is an aſpect of welcome in every domeſtic one meets. Even the maſtiff in the court is ſo gentle, ſo humanized by the children, and "bears his faculties ſo meek," that the very beggar is not afraid of *Truſty*, though he bays him.

In ſuch quarters, and with ſuch ſociety, I do not count the weeks of my ſtay, like your correſpondent *Urbanus*. The family talks of not

viſiting

viſiting Edinburgh ſooner than Chriſtmas, and it is not improbable that I may ſtay with them till that time: ſo if your coffeehouſe-friend takes notes of arrivals this winter, he may poſſibly mark me down in my ſeat in the coach deſtined for N° 7. anſwering the queſtions of two cherub-faced boys, who are a ſort of pupils of mine here in all the idle branches of their education.

I am,

SIR,

Your moſt obedient ſervant,

W. G.

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